(c) whether Government of Kerala has sent any request to the Union Government seeking use of rubber bitumen in the construction of National Highways and other roads; and

(d) if so, the details thereof along with the action taken by Government thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) One study on the viability of using rubber/polymer modified bitumen was got conducted by the Ministry through Central Road Research Institute, New Delhi. This study has revealed that rubber/ polymer modified bitumen provides more durable roads by reducing susceptibility towards temperature variations and improving the desirable properties of bitumen thereby giving overall better performance.

(c) and (d) The Government of Kerala have sent one proposal seeking use of rubberized bitumen in surfacing 12 km length of NH-213, which has been sanctioned. Besides, use of ruberized bitumen in surfacing has been approved for a length of about 24 km on NH-17 and NH-208 in Kerala, in surfacing under improvement of riding quality programme.

Rise in buffer stock of foodgrains

*368. SHRI RAJU PARMAR:
SHRI BHAGATRAM MANHAR:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the buffer stock of foodgrains by the end of this year is estimated to rise from the existing 580 lakh tonnes to more than 675 lakh tonnes;

(b) if so, what steps Government have taken or propose to take to tackle this problem; and

(c) whether Government would consider to revamp the Public Distribution System (PDS) and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR): (a) The total stocks of wheat and rice in the Central Pool as on 1.1.2002 were 580.32 lakh MTs. Keeping in view the likely procurement and off take during the year 2002, it was estimated that the total stocks of wheat and rice in the Central Pool as on 1.1.2003 would be 675.12 lakh MTs.

(b) and (c) The Central Government has recently taken the following measures to tackle this problem :—

(i) The allocation of foodgrains for Antyodaya and other BPL families under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) has been increased from 25 kg. per family per month to 35 kg. per family per month. Further, the allocation for APL families has also been fixed at 35 kg. per family per month with effect from 1.4.2002.

(ii) The Central Issue Prices (CIPs) for APL category have been reduced by Rs. 100 per quintal in respect of both rice and wheat with effect from 1.4.2002.

(iii) The allocation for all welfare institutions and SC/ST/OBC hostels has been fixed uniformly at the rate of 15 kg. per head per month. An additional allocation equal to 5% of the BPL allocation of States/UTs has been made on this account at BPL rates.

(iv) 50 lakh MTs of wheat and 10 lakh MTs of rice will be sold under the Open Market Sales Scheme during the year 2002-03.

(v) Quantitative restrictions on the export of rice, wheat and wheat products have been removed subject to the condition that the stocks in the Central Pool will not be lower than the buffer stock of 243 lakh MTs (100 lakh MTs of rice and 143 lakh MTs of wheat) at any point of time. Besides, to increase the export of wheat and rice, WTO compatible subsidies will be provided.

(vi) A decision has been taken to enter into counter trade and/or commodity assistance to other countries on terms to be decided on case to case basis.

As a result of the above measures, it is expected that the offtake of foodgrains from the Central Pool will increase by 160 lakh MTs in a full year.

Lifting of control over foodgrains

*369. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to free foodgrains from its control;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) by when Government are going to introduce the Warehousing Receipt Act which would enable the farmers to go to a private owner of a warehouse for better price of their produce; and

(d) what are the salient features of the proposed policy?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHANTA KUMAR): (a) and (b) The Central Government have issued an Order under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 allowing dealers to freely buy, stock, sell, transport, distribute, dispose, etc. any quantity in respect of wheat, paddy/rice, coarse grains, sugar, edible oilseeds and edible oils without requiring any license or permit therefor under any order issued under the Act. The Order took effect after thirty days from the date of its issue (15.2.2002) notwithstanding anything to the country in any Order made by a State Government before the commencement of the Order.

(c) and (d) An Expert Committee appointed by Government of India in the Ministry of Agriculture has *inter-alia* recommended to introduce a system of negotiable warehouse receipt in the country in respect of agricultural commodities for improved credit delivery,